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AUTHOR Feldstein, Jerome H.  
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ABSTRACT

The likelihood that females designate persons of the opposite sex as models more often than do males was investigated. Subjects, 61 boys and 64 girls from the sixth grade, plus 52 males and 83 female college students, indicated which other person, past or present, they would most like to be. Approximately 25% of females designated male models while cross-sex choices by males were negligible, the sex difference being statistically reliable at both age levels. Among children, public school girls made significantly more cross-sex choices than parochial school peers. Results indicated that lack of available female models was not the sole reason for obtained sex differences and that television played an inordinate role in children's choices. (Author)

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Sex Differences in Cross-Sex Choices of Models

Jerome H. Feldstein

Herbert H. Lehman College of the  
City University of New York

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## Abstract

To test the hypothesis that females are more likely than males to designate persons of the opposite sex as models, 260 subjects, 61 boys and 64 girls from the sixth grade plus 52 male and 83 female college students, indicated which other person, past or present, they would most like to be. Approximately 25% of females designated male models while cross-sex choices by males were negligible, the sex difference being statistically reliable at both age levels. Among children, public school girls made significantly more cross-sex choices than parochial school peers. Most frequently chosen models and categories of models were described. It was concluded that lack of available female models was not the sole reason for obtained sex differences and that television played an inordinate role in children's choices.

The present study was designed to compare same-and-cross-sex choices of persons that males and females, from sixth grade and college, would most like to be. There is evidence that parents are more negative concerning traditional cross-sex activities by boys than by girls (Lansky, 1967), boys show stronger preference for same-sex activities than do girls (Brown, 1957), and girls show greater preference for the opposite sex role than boys do (Lynn, 1969). In addition, more women have indicated a desire to be men than men have to be women (Gallup, 1972). Finally, there is evidence that opposite sex behavior is more strongly prohibited and more frequently punished in boys (Hartley, 1959).

Subjects in the present study were asked to state the name of any individual that they would most like to be. It was expected that cross-sex choices would be more frequent among females than males. In addition, the task was presented to both children and adults. It was expected that cross-sex choices would be more frequent among sixth grade girls than college women since college students should be more aware of the women's movement and more knowledgeable concerning possible female models. No age difference in cross-sex choices was expected among males since social pressures toward appropriate "masculinity" are present from early in childhood.

#### Method

### Subjects

A total of 260 subjects took part in the study. Of these subjects, 125 were sixth grade students from two suburban schools and 135 were college students taking introductory psychology. Among sixth graders there were 61 boys and 64 girls; there were 52 men and 83 women in the college sample. In addition, 70 children, 34 boys and 36 girls were from a public school and 55 children, 27 boys and 26 girls, were from a parochial school.

### Procedure

All data were collected during regular sessions of introductory psychology or sixth grade classes. Questionnaires were distributed and subjects were informed that participation was strictly voluntary. Next, instructions were read aloud and any questions were answered. The first question was worded as follows: "If you could change places with any other person, past or present, who would you most like to be?" The next question requested a brief explanation for the choice made. The remainder of the questionnaire was not relevant to the present study. Questionnaires were then collected and respondents were thanked for their assistance.

### Results

Choices of models were of four types: (a) same-sex, (b) cross-sex, (c) indeterminate, and (d) self. Responses such

as "Myself" may have represented an unwillingness to respond; since the frequency of such self responses did not differ significantly between sexes, they were omitted from further consideration. Indeterminate responses were those for which gender was not obvious such as "Rockefeller" or "a doctor". For purposes of statistical analysis, indeterminate responses were combined with cross-sex choices in order to maintain sufficient expected values in cells representing cross-sex choices by males.

Table 1 contains frequencies of same-sex, cross-sex,

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Insert Table 1 about here

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and indeterminate choices by males and females from sixth grade and college. Females made more cross-sex choices than males in both sixth grade,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.35$ ,  $p < .05$ , and college,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ; such choices were negligible among males at both age levels. However, there was a difference between schools among sixth grade girls. Parochial school students made 22 same-sex choices and only one cross-sex designation while public school girls made 8 cross-sex and 3 indeterminate choices out of 28 responses, a statistically reliable difference,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.73$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, the difference between sixth grade boys and girls was due to the performance of girls from the public school sample. No significant age differences in cross-sex choices were obtained between subjects of either sex.

The models chosen were divided into 12 different categories. The 7 most frequent categories and the number of models chosen from each, by each group of subjects, are found in Table 2. Political-historical figures (e.g. Gerald Ford,

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Martin Luther King, Betsy Ross) were most frequently chosen by college students of both sexes, followed by entertainment and sports figures by men and entertainment figures and friends and relatives by women. Entertainment figures predominated among models of sixth grade girls and, along with sports figures, boys as well. Friends-relatives followed among boys' choices and, along with political-historical figures (often Betsy Ross) girls' choices also.

Names of publically-known individuals designated by at least 2 subjects, and their frequencies of choice by each group of subjects, are presented in Table 3. The most fre-

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Insert Table 3 about here

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quently chosen models tended to be found among choices of females. No public figure was designated by more than 2 males. Only Gerald Ford, then President of the United States, was designated by subjects from all groups. Since it appeared that female subjects were more likely than males to make repeated responses, choices of models designated by others within their group, the frequencies of such responses were compared

between groups. Sixth grade girls made significantly more repeated responses than boys,  $\chi^2(1) = 16.58$ ,  $p < .001$ , and significantly more than college women,  $\chi^2(1) = 10.38$ ,  $p < .01$ . No sex difference was obtained between college students and no age difference was found among males. Thus, it appears that sixth grade girls were choosing from a smaller set of publically-known models than were subjects in other groups.

#### Conclusions

The frequency of cross-sex choices was significantly higher among females than males at both age levels, but no age difference was obtained. The sex difference among children was due to the public school rather than the parochial school students. It is difficult to speculate about the reasons for this school difference among girls and it is not known whether females who attended parochial schools through college would also fail to designate cross-sex models since all older subjects were from a public college. This difference could have resulted from educational differences, family background, or some other factor or factors.

Cross-sex choices were almost nonexistent among males but made up approximately 25% of female responses. The extremely small number of cross-sex choices among males is probably a result of greater social pressure to be "masculine" rather than just a lack of potential female models. Cross-sex choices of sixth grade girls consisted mainly of actors and

singers, categories which contain large numbers of potential female models as well. Similarly, half the cross-sex choices of college women represented entertainment figures or male relatives and friends while the remainder represented categories from which female models are lacking or not as well known. (e.g. U.S. Presidents or people with specific achievements). Thus, lack of available female models may only be one factor in cross-sex choices by females.

It is interesting to note the great influence of television on the choices made by children. For girls, 18 choices (35% of total) were of women appearing regularly on television; boys picked 13 professional athletes, probably encountered through television, as well as 5 regular television performers (34% of total). Characters from children's literature were noticeably lacking.

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Table 1  
 Frequencies of Same-Sex, Cross-Sex, and Indeterminate  
 Models Chosen by Males and Females  
 from Sixth Grade and College

| Sex of subject     | <u>Sex of Model</u> |       |        |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------|--------|
|                    | Same                | Cross | Indet. |
| <u>Sixth Grade</u> |                     |       |        |
| Male               | 50                  | 1     | 2      |
| Female             | 39                  | 8     | 4      |
| <u>College</u>     |                     |       |        |
| Male               | 44                  | 1     | 3.     |
| Female             | 55                  | 16    | 2      |

Table 2

Number of Males and Females from Sixth Grade and College  
who Chose Models from Each of the  
Most Frequent Categories

| Category              | <u>Age and Sex</u> |        |                |        |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------|----------------|--------|
|                       | <u>Sixth Grade</u> |        | <u>College</u> |        |
|                       | Male               | Female | Male           | Female |
| Friend-relative       | 9                  | 8      | 4              | 11     |
| Sports                | 15                 | 3      | 6              | 3      |
| Entertainment         | 15                 | 23     | 6              | 14     |
| Political-historical  | 6                  | 8      | 11             | 20     |
| Arts-humanities       | 0                  | 2      | 5              | 3      |
| Academic-professional | 0                  | 5      | 1              | 3      |
| Science-medicine      | 4                  | 1      | 5              | 11     |

Table 3

Public Figures Designated by More than a Single Subject  
and Frequencies of Each by Age and Sex

Age and Sex

| <u>Public figure</u> | <u>Sixth Grade</u> |               | <u>College</u> |               | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
|                      | <u>Male</u>        | <u>Female</u> | <u>Male</u>    | <u>Female</u> |              |
| Cher                 | 0                  | 6             | 0              | 0             | 6            |
| Bionic Woman         | 0                  | 5             | 0              | 0             | 5            |
| Gerald Ford          | 1                  | 1             | 1              | 1             | 4            |
| Flo. Nightingale     | 0                  | 0             | 0              | 4             | 4            |
| Jackie Onassis       | 0                  | 0             | 0              | 4             | 4            |
| Betsy Ross           | 0                  | 4             | 0              | 0             | 4            |
| Cleopatra            | 0                  | 0             | 0              | 3             | 3            |
| Martin L. King       | 0                  | 0             | 2              | 1             | 3            |
| John Wayne           | 1                  | 2             | 0              | 0             | 3            |
| Mohammed Ali         | 1                  | 0             | 1              | 0             | 2            |
| Sonny Bono           | 2                  | 0             | 0              | 0             | 2            |
| Jesus Christ         | 0                  | 0             | 1              | 1             | 2            |
| Leonardo DaVinci     | 0                  | 0             | 2              | 0             | 2            |
| Barbara Eden         | 0                  | 2             | 0              | 0             | 2            |
| Albert Einstein      | 0                  | 0             | 2              | 0             | 2            |
| Dorothy Hamil        | 0                  | 2             | 0              | 0             | 2            |
| Abe Lincoln          | 0                  | 0             | 2              | 0             | 2            |
| Golda Meir           | 0                  | 0             | 0              | 2             | 2            |
| Elvis Presley        | 2                  | 0             | 0              | 0             | 2            |

J. H. Feldstein

12

|                   | Male | Female | Male | Female | Total |
|-------------------|------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| Nels. Rockefeller | 0    | 0      | 1    | 1      | 2     |
| Geo. Washington   | 2    | 0      | 0    | 0      | 2     |
| Raquel Welch      | 0    | 1      | 0    | 1      | 2     |
| Laura I. Wilder   | 0    | 2      | 0    | 0      | 2     |